

# Autochthony and activism among contemporary Irish Nationalists in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>, or: if ‘civic’ nationalists are ‘ethno’-cultural revivalists, what remains of the civic/ ethnic divide?

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**ABSTRACT.** This article argues for dissolving the civic–ethnic dichotomy into several analytical dimensions and suggests ‘autochthony’ and ‘activism’ as two such alternatives. It does so by first presenting a case study of Irish language revivalism and identity discourses in the North of Ireland, in which locals turn out to be both ‘civic’ nationalists and ‘ethno’-cultural revivalists. The article then advocates treating these aspects as belonging to two distinct dimensions: the first is concerned with the causal logic underlying the reproduction of nationhood in terms of autochthony, while the second specifies different forms of activism aimed at (re)constituting the nation. Finally, reinterpreting the empirical case in terms of these two dimensions, it is shown that the type of activism is dependent on the specificities of ‘threats’ to the nation rather than on the underlying type of autochthony, which further substantiates the necessity to disambiguate the civic–ethnic distinction.

**KEY WORDS:** autochthony; civic–ethnic dichotomy; identity; nationalism; Northern Ireland; politics of belonging

## Introduction

Within the study of nationalism, there is a long history of analysing empirical cases of nationhood and national identity according to basic classifications. While some authors have developed quite elaborate typologies (e.g. Smith in his *Theories of Nationalism*, 1983: 211–29), most have been content with using one of several root dichotomies such as ‘political–cultural,’ ‘liberal–illiberal,’ or ‘universalistic–particularistic.’ Moving back in time, the genealogy of such dichotomies notably includes an early distinction between ‘voluntarist’ and

‘organic’ nationalisms in the late nineteenth century (Smith 2001: 36); Meinecke’s (1919) opposition between the largely passive *Kultur*nation and the politically active *Staats*nation; and – most prominently perhaps – Kohn’s (1944) argument around the mid-twentieth century, contrasting ‘Western’ with ‘Eastern’ nationalism.

Kohn’s basic distinction has proven highly influential within studies of nationalism. In recent years, the dichotomy has gained further prominence through a terminological distinction between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nationalism. As Smith put it, the ‘civic’ or Western model is hereby ‘predominantly a spatial or territorial conception’, whereas the distinguishing feature of the ‘ethnic’ or non-Western nation is ‘its emphasis on a community of birth and native culture’ (Smith 1991: 9, 11). Within this framework, civic nationalism has typically been positively valued as inclusive, whereas ethnic nationalism has largely been negatively valued as exclusive.

Such broad and fundamental conceptions of nationalisms – ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’, ‘ethnic’ and ‘civic’ – have not been without their critics. Kohn’s regionalism has been widely criticised for its reductionism and neo-orientalist undertones (Spencer and Wollman 2005: 200). Thus, it has become a mainstream position within nationalism studies to regard ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ primarily as ideal-type positions and to analyse all concrete cases of nationalism as containing both ‘civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms. Sometimes civic and territorial elements predominate; at other times it is the ethnic and vernacular components that are emphasized’ (Smith 1991: 13).

Despite these more nuanced usages of the civic–ethnic divide, several observers have nevertheless highlighted the inherent ambiguities of this master dichotomy. According to Brubaker (2004: 136–40), the civic–ethnic distinction is analytically ambiguous in that both terms can be defined either broadly or narrowly, leading to fundamental problems in the concrete application of the dichotomy. Brubaker (2004: 140–44) further shows the civic–ethnic distinction to be also haunted by normative ambiguities. As has already been mentioned, ‘civic’ nationalism has been typically seen as positively inclusive, whereas ‘ethnic’ nationalism has been criticised for being dangerously exclusive. Yet, apart from highlighting that inclusion is not inherently positive, Brubaker (2004: 141) aptly states that ‘in fact all understandings of nationhood and all forms of nationalism are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. What varies is not the fact or even the degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness, but the bases or criteria of inclusion and exclusion.’ Against this backdrop, Brubaker argues for the dissolution of the civic–ethnic dichotomy and suggests, as a modest alternative, a distinction between ‘state-framed’ and ‘counter-state’ understandings of nationhood.

In this article, I follow this line of argumentation, which insists on the necessity of replacing the single, ambiguous, and overloaded civic–ethnic divide with several analytical dimensions. Based on a case study of language revivalism and identity discourses among Irish nationalists, I suggest that the

two dimensions of ‘autochthony’ and ‘activism’ yield better understandings of nationalism. This argument proceeds in three steps: Initially, based on ethnographic fieldwork, the case of Irish language activists in Catholic West Belfast is presented. The range of language practices is characterised as are representations of the language itself. As it turns out, many locals see Irish as a crucial element of their ‘Irish culture’ in need of being repossessed. When talking about their Irishness, however, the same actors tend to emphasise ‘being born in Ireland’ rather than ‘Irish culture’ as the defining criterion, explicitly including Protestants. Framed in civic–ethnic terms, locals thus seem to be both ‘civic’ nationalists and ‘ethno’-cultural revivalists.

Yet instead of interpreting this case as incorporating ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ elements within a single dimension, I treat these aspects as belonging to two distinct dimensions. The first is concerned with the causal logic underlying the reproduction of nationhood in terms of ‘autochthony’ – i.e. the proclaimed ‘original’ link between an individual, territory, and group. The dichotomy within this dimension is based on different causal trajectories through which the same elements are linked: ‘individualised autochthony’ sees shared culture and/or descent as a likely consequence of place of birth and/or residence, while ‘collectivised autochthony’ inverts this causality. The second dimension contrasts ‘political’ with ‘cultural activism’, with the former referring to practices (re)constituting the nation as politically autonomous and the latter as culturally distinctive.

In a final step, I reinterpret the empirical case using these new dimensions of ‘autochthony’ and ‘activism’. As is shown with regard to the ‘cultural activism’ of ‘individualised-autochthonous’ nationalists in Catholic West Belfast, the type and extent of activism is actually independent from the underlying type of autochthony, but contingent on the ways in which the nation is contested. Thus it is shown how framing this empirical case in terms of the single civic–ethnic divide would not sensitise the observer to such interdependencies, which easily go unnoticed because of the master dichotomy’s misleading equation of ‘civic’ with ‘the political’ and ‘ethnic’ with ‘the cultural’. This substantiates the need to disambiguate the civic–ethnic distinction into several analytical dimensions.

### **Language revivalism and discourses on Irishness in the North of Ireland**

Despite fundamental changes in recent years, society in the North of Ireland still remains divided along nearly co-extensive lines of religious, ethnic, and political self-ascriptions, ensuring that – as all generally available public opinion data persistently show (Coakley 2007; Trew 1998) – most Catholics see themselves as Irish and politically subscribe to the Nationalist/Republican agenda of uniting Ireland, whereas most Protestants identify themselves as British and, as Unionists/Loyalists, wish to maintain ‘the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland’ (Coulter 1999: 10–22; Zenker 2006).<sup>2</sup> In

cities like Belfast, this social divide is manifested in considerable residential segregation (Doherty and Poole 2000: 189). This particularly applies to West Belfast, where I did fourteen months of fieldwork in 2003 and 2004 on the relationship between the Irish language and identity.<sup>3</sup> This part of the city consists of two areas – a Protestant one to the north and a larger Catholic area to the south – that are largely physically divided by so-called ‘peace lines’ across which interaction continues to be limited. It is hence not surprising that almost all of my informants in Catholic West Belfast came only from the Irish Nationalist/Republican community.

Within the confines of Catholic West Belfast, the Irish language has recently experienced a remarkable revival. Irish belongs to a group of six Celtic languages. Although as a Celtic language, Irish is part of the Indo-European family of languages, it is only distantly related to the Germanic branch of which English is a part (Hindley 1990: 3; Murchú 2000: 3; Price 2000; Schrijver 2000). Historically, over the course of Ireland’s long colonial history and especially in the nineteenth century, the prevailing language, Irish, was increasingly replaced by English. Despite the continued existence of the ‘Gaeltacht’ – that is, small areas inhabited by native Irish speakers along the west coast – the Irish language continues to be threatened with extinction. Although since the late nineteenth century the ‘death of the Irish language’ (Hindley 1990) has been slowed, it has not been reversed, notwithstanding the attempts of several cultural revival movements (Hutchinson 1987; Murchú 2000; Purdon 1999).

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the Irish language was no longer significantly practiced in Catholic West Belfast throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Yet as historical sources, my own fieldwork material, as well as the historiographical<sup>4</sup> and ethnographical<sup>5</sup> literature show, this situation changed considerably from the 1950s onwards, when a local language revival began to gain momentum. While grossly simplifying the underlying dynamics, it can be said that this success has been mainly due to two factors: first, the establishment of a quite effective language *supply* by a small circle of committed language activists; and second, increasing local *demand* for practising the language, a demand that in complex ways has been stimulated by the ‘Troubles’, that is, the recent political conflict.

During the 1960s, a group of language enthusiasts founded Ireland’s first urban Gaeltacht in Catholic West Belfast, where Irish has been spoken as the everyday language ever since. This establishment of a small Gaeltacht neighbourhood proved particularly consequential because it gave the language a permanent location from which further initiatives could develop (Maguire 1991; Nig Uidhir 2006). As families in this neighbourhood raised their children with Irish as their first language, Irish-medium education became the next pressing issue. These same Irish speakers thus also founded and ran the first Irish-medium school in the North of Ireland despite the disapproval of educational authorities, who for more than a decade refused to support the school financially. Initially the school catered only for children

from the immediate community, but soon it was also opened to pupils from surrounding neighbourhoods who had acquired some Irish while attending a language-immersion nursery that had also been established within the urban Gaeltacht. The Irish-medium school and nursery were later to function as 'blueprints' for many other educational institutions throughout the entire North of Ireland (Mac Corraidh 2006). Within the wider networks of these activists, additional language initiatives appeared, including the foundation of a local Irish-language centre in 1991, which has since provided a focal point for local Irish-medium interactions.

Corresponding to this expanding infrastructure of language supply, there has also been a growing demand for Irish-language activities. Beginning in the 1970s, thousands of locals started learning Irish in informal evening classes, which began to proliferate in social clubs, schools, pubs, parish halls, and private houses in Catholic West Belfast. Others learned the language during increasingly long terms of imprisonment (Kachuk 1993: 152–8; O'Reilly 1999: 17–31; Feldman 1991: 204–45). From the 1980s onwards, many Republicans within the IRA and its political wing, Sinn Féin, who had hitherto not ascribed much importance to the Irish language also began to promote it (McKeown 2001). In addition, increasing numbers of parents sought Irish-medium schools for their children, and such demand spurred the founding of ever more Irish-medium schools. Especially since the 1990s, this has led to an explosion of Irish-medium education. Together, all of these factors have led to a dramatic increase in the actual practice of the Irish language within Catholic West Belfast and beyond.

Against this background of local language practice, I now want to turn to representations of the Irish language. During my fieldwork, I discerned three basic positions regarding Irish among local Irish speakers (see also Kachuk 1993 and especially O'Reilly 1997, 1999). A small group consisting mainly of language lobbyists has articulated a rights-based approach, depicting the Irish language as an issue of 'human', 'civil' and/or 'minority rights' that is above narrow political concerns such as the constitutional status of the North of Ireland. From this perspective, the language is sometimes viewed as a precious yet endangered object of culture. It is important to note, however, that in this context the term 'culture' is used to refer not to a distinctive 'national culture' typically associated with Irishness (as in the following two positions) but to an overarching 'human culture', the diversity of which must be protected as an end in itself through a kind of cultural environmentalism. In contrast, for those holding the second, 'culturalist' position, Irish represents a fundamental yet largely lost element of their own 'Irish culture and identity'. However, culturalists argue for a strict separation between issues related to the Irish language and the politics of unifying Ireland. These actors therefore have tended to be suspicious of any public 'performances' of the Irish language by Republican politicians, whom they have accused of 'hijacking' the language, abusing it as a mere means to their ultimately political ends. Those associated with a third, 'politicianist' position share with culturalists the conviction that the

Irish language is an important element of Irishness, which must reappropriated. Yet 'politicists' reject the suggestion that they (or their allies) have 'hijacked' the language, arguing that by speaking Irish one already is and should be engaged in the political struggle for decolonising Ireland and, thus, liberating it from its external British oppressors.

Despite some important differences, the culturalist and politicist positions – which, to my knowledge, prevail locally – have one important feature in common, namely the representation of the Irish language as a crucial element of their own 'Irish culture' in need of repossession. This notion of Irish as 'our own native language', which I encountered again and again in conversations with locals, seems to have become both widespread and relevant in Catholic West Belfast only since the 1970s, although the close link between Irish and Irishness was propagated in Nationalist discourses as far back as the nineteenth century (Andrews 2000a, 2000b; Hindley 1990: 21–42; Hutchinson 1987; Kachuk 1993: 112–51; O'Reilly 1999: 32–48). While culturalist and politicist Irish speakers have hence been united in clearly pursuing their local language activism in Catholic West Belfast as 'ethno'-cultural revivalists, it is interesting to observe that, when discussing their Irish identity, these same actors actually turn out to be far less 'ethnic' than scholars attuned to the civic-ethnic divide might expect.

When conversing with locals about their Irishness, I frequently came across a set of three basic components of this identity. Take, for instance, Mary,<sup>6</sup> a woman in her fifties, born and raised in a Republican family in Catholic West Belfast, whom I regularly met in the course of Irish-language classes. When we talked about her sense of identity, Mary echoed my question, replying, 'What makes somebody Irish? Being born in Ireland, being part of the Irish culture. Just that they always identify themselves as Irish and never ever as British.'<sup>7</sup> This short extract nicely sums up the three core components of local Irishness, namely 'being born in Ireland', 'being part of Irish culture', and finally one's own self-identification as being Irish.

Among these aspects, 'being born in Ireland' is usually the first thing that comes to people's minds. So, for instance, Robert, a sixty-three-year-old Catholic, immediately responded, 'Basically, if you are born in Ireland.'<sup>8</sup> Equally, forty-seven-year-old Martina emphasised that she 'was born here', when asked why she was Irish. In explaining what she meant by 'here,' she said: 'In Ireland. I don't class myself as British because I happen to be born this side of the border. It all comes down to, I think, what is on the map: on the island of Ireland.'<sup>9</sup> This illustrates what, to my knowledge, is a largely uniform pattern in Catholic West Belfast: 'Ireland' is construed in Catholics' geography of national identity as the whole of the island of Ireland; it is the seemingly self-evident natural givenness of a geographical unity to which their sense of place of birth refers rather than to political units on the island, which are seen as artificial.

The notion of 'being born in Ireland' thus provides a discourse of inclusion for both children of immigrants and for local Protestants under the common

denominator of Irishness. However, Mary's second aspect of Irishness – 'being part of Irish culture' – seems to have rather excluding effects for descendants of immigrants and for Protestants in particular. 'Irish culture' is typically seen in Catholic West Belfast as comprising 'Gaelic Games' such as Gaelic Football, Hurling, or its female version, Camogie. It also encompasses forms of 'Irish dancing' and 'Irish traditional music' as well as the Irish language. What makes these things self-evidently 'Irish' was aptly summarised by one of my younger informants, a seventeen-year-old boy named Daithi: 'Cause you wouldn't find it anywhere else in the world. 'Cause you are not going to go to China and find people playing Hurling.'<sup>10</sup> 'Irish culture' is thus seen to consist of things that exist only in Ireland – or, to be more precise, that are seen as originating from or rightfully belonging to the Irish people, hence making the Irish people distinctive *as* Irish people. While many Catholics would stress that these elements of 'Irish culture' are not restricted to Catholics but also rightfully belong to local Protestants as fellow Irishmen, few would deny that 'Irish culture' – especially the Gaelic Games and the Irish language – is predominantly practised by Catholics. In practice, 'Irish culture' thus seems to exclude Protestants. However, a second look at the perceived relationship between practising 'Irish culture' and 'the Irish people' among Catholics reveals a much weaker connection.

Many Catholics, and especially those who are heavily involved in 'Irish culture', assert that they do not see 'cultural' practice as a precondition for being Irish. Take, for example, the following statement by Peadar, an Irish speaker in his thirties, who has been a language activist for his entire professional life:

I don't want to be snobbish, but the ability to speak Irish surely reinforces one's Irishness. But it is not a prerequisite to being Irish. Just because I speak Irish makes me not more Irish, but personally, I undoubtedly feel more Irish. Do I feel that others do need to speak Irish to be wholeheartedly Irish? Definitely not! I don't see that as a contradiction. For me personally, to have the ability to speak Irish enriches my Irishness.<sup>11</sup>

This quotation reveals a very typical pattern of argumentation among Catholics: practical involvement with some form of 'Irish culture' is seen as making one personally feel 'more Irish', but such involvement is rejected as either 'actually' making one more Irish or as a general precondition of Irishness. On a personal level, practising 'Irish culture' may enrich one's Irishness or, as many locals suggest, it may help reassure them of their own Irish identity in times of conflict, during which questions of identity become both salient and contested. Practising 'Irish culture' may be helpful as a 'decolonising weapon' in demonstrating one's own 'cultural' distinctiveness vis-à-vis what is seen as an ethnically different oppressor; or it may be seen as something that Irish people should do in order to maintain a valuable and distinctive 'culture' under threat of destruction, with those Irish people who don't seem to care being frowned upon. But such apathetic individuals remain 'Irish' nevertheless; they are generally not seen as being 'less Irish' but only as

(regrettably) less interested in ‘their own’ culture. In short, while the actual practice of ‘Irish culture’ can potentially provide a basis for the exclusion of Protestants from Irishness – something Protestants often emphasise – this is usually not the point of view of local Catholics.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that many local Catholics insist that Protestants are actually also Irish. This position was concisely expressed by Seán, a sixteen-year-old pupil of the local Irish-medium secondary school, when asked about the identity of local Protestants:

Protestants just have a different religion. It would be Unionists. Unionists claim to be British and want to be part of the British Isles. They claim to be British. But I would say: No, they are Irish. They were born in Ireland; they have an Irish background; their parents were born in Ireland as well. They follow a different culture, but they are still Irish.<sup>12</sup>

While Seán stresses that ethnic and political identification rather than religious background matters, and while he acknowledges that ‘Unionists’ follow a culture different from ‘Irish culture’, he nevertheless characterises them as Irish because of their place of birth. Inclusion based on birth location thus supersedes the potentially exclusionary element of ‘Irish cultural’ practice in the ascription of Irishness. Yet this fairly widespread position sits uneasily with the third aspect of Irishness, which Mary mentioned in the interview quoted above, namely one’s self-identification as Irish. In my experience, local Catholics usually insist on the importance of this aspect for someone to qualify as ‘Irish’. However, when it comes to Protestants, the latter tend to be seen as Irish, whatever their own self-ascriptions. As I argue elsewhere, the reason that many Catholics ultimately disregard Protestants’ right to self-identify lies in the logics of local politics: the legitimacy of Nationalist and Republican discourses has for long rested on the idea that ‘Protestants, Catholics, and Dissenters’ are – or, to be more precise, *have to be* – fellow Irishmen (Zenker 2006).

However, instead of further delving into this political dynamic here, it should suffice to note that when talking about their Irishness, local Catholics tend to emphasise ‘being born in Ireland’ rather than self-identification or ‘being part of Irish culture’ as the main defining criterion. Framed in civic–ethnic terms, locals are thus evidently ‘civic’ nationalists. In integrating both the analyses of the language revival and of local discourses on Irishness, I am hence tempted to conclude that most of my informants are actually ‘ethno’-cultural revivalists *as well as* ‘civic’ nationalists. Yet if this is the case, if ‘ethno’-cultural revivalists are in fact ‘civic’ nationalists, what, then, remains of the civic–ethnic divide?

### **‘Autochthony’ and ‘activism’ as analytic alternatives to the civic–ethnic divide**

Instead of seeing this empirical case as simply comprising ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ elements within a single dimension, I instead interpret the ‘civic’ nationalism



and 'ethno'-cultural revivalism of my informants as constituting two separate phenomena, one related to different modes of 'autochthony' and the other to varieties of 'activism'.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, the term 'autochthon' is derived from the Greek *autos* ('self') and *khthôn* ('earth'), literally meaning 'sprung from the earth'; the word designates 'an original or indigenous inhabitant of a place' (Soanes and Stevenson 2003: 107). Against this backdrop, autochthony can be provisionally defined as referring to a proclaimed 'original' link between an individual, territory, and group, which typically presents itself as 'self-evident', 'authentic', 'primordial', and/or 'natural'.<sup>13</sup> In a recent literature review on the current upsurge of autochthony discourses in Africa and Europe, Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005) observe that the closely related term 'indigenous peoples' has gained a somewhat broader appeal, especially since the establishment of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (1982). However, 'indigenous peoples' are usually conceived of as marginalised 'others' in need of protection on 'their own lands', whilst the 'autochthon' is typically conceived of as an 'in-group' in need of protection from scrounging strangers – the 'allochthons' – who have immigrated into 'one's own homeland' (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005: 386).

Since the 1990s, 'autochthony' has become a violently contested issue in many African countries. This development can be seen as an 'unexpected corollary' of democratisation in the form of reintroduced multipartyism as well as decentralised development policies that increasingly by-pass the state (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005: 385, 389–90; Bayart, Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2001). Being a crucial mode within the new politics of belonging that has emerged as the flip-side of globalisation, autochthony discourses thereby take various forms (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005; Geschiere and Jackson 2006). As a fascinating new body of literature on various African and European countries<sup>14</sup> shows, autochthony is typically used as a means of specifying, with regard to the state, both which level within a segmentary identity structure is the relevant one for a given context and which identity definition on that level is appropriate. In some contexts autochthony thereby functions as an alternative to national citizenship; in other settings, it operates rather as its redefinition.

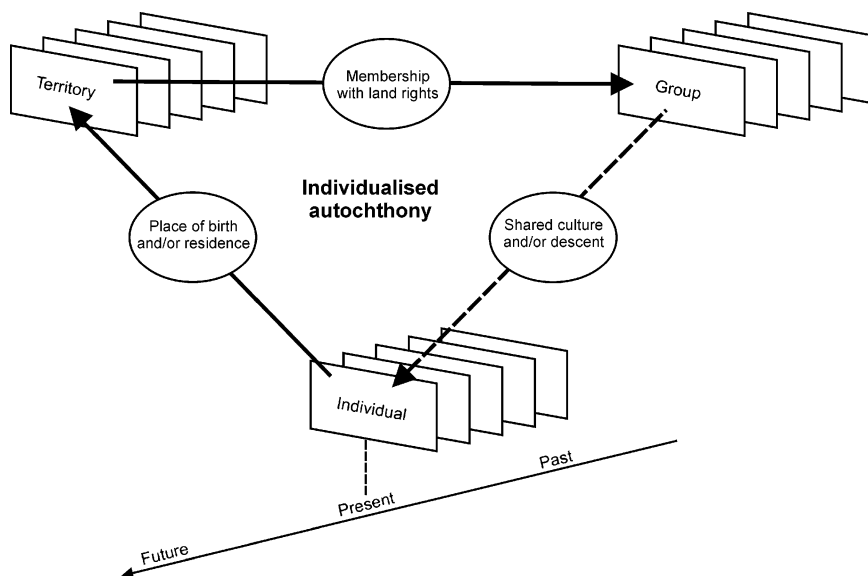
As these observations suggest, this new ethnographic scholarship explicitly addresses the relationship between autochthony and other forms of belonging such as ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship. Yet it is interesting to note that these texts typically engage with this relationship *empirically* rather than *conceptually*. In other words, the authors often use terms such as 'ethnic groups', 'national citizenship', or 'the nation' as conventional labels for specific *levels* within a segmentary identity structure without sufficiently addressing the question as to what *analytically* distinguishes these different forms of belonging.<sup>15</sup> In instances where the concept of autochthony is in some way specified, this is usually done ambiguously by, on the one hand, characterising autochthony as 'a new form of ethnicity' equally capable of

‘creating an us–them opposition’ and ‘arousing strong emotions regarding the defense of home and of ancestral lands’ (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000: 424; see also Ceuppens 2006: 151; Geschiere and Jackson 2006: 5–6). On the other hand, autochthony is also represented as being different from ethnicity (Ceuppens 2006: 149; Geschiere and Jackson 2006: 5–6), since the latter term ‘evokes the existence of a more or less clearly defined ethnic group with its own substance and a specific name and history’, whereas autochthony is ‘empty’ – ‘an identity with no particular name and no specified history, only expressing the claim to have come first, which is always open to contest’ (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005: 387).

These definitions by Geschiere and other authors seem to suggest that autochthony should ultimately be treated as distinct from ethnicity. But a second look at the above-mentioned empirical cases from Africa and Europe shows that almost all described ‘autochthonous’ identities below the level of (nation-)states actually do refer to named *ethnic* groups, which not only have specifiable histories but in fact specify them (among others) through claims of having been the first in ‘their own territory’. Furthermore, even where the nation and its citizenry are reclassified through autochthony on the state level, this smaller-scale redefinition is typically ‘ethnic’, rather than ‘civic’ in nature. In fact, the replacement of ‘civic’ citizenship with a more restrictive ‘ethnic’ citizenship is usually the very *raison d’être* for the evocation of a rhetoric of autochthony in the first place. In the end, this seems to suggest that, despite some proclamations to the contrary, within this new ethnography of autochthony, it is usually the ‘ethnic’ that legitimises privileged access to land through autochthonous first-comer claims rooted in the past.

It is somewhat ironic that when comparing these observations with the briefly discussed civic–ethnic divide within studies of nationalism, it becomes evident that both bodies of literature provide rather contradictory accounts as to how identity formations literally ‘take place’: within studies of nationalism, it is generally the ‘non-ethnic’ (‘the civic’) that is associated with territory through place of birth and/or residence (the ‘ethnic’ being mainly linked to descent and/or culture), whereas in research on autochthony, it is typically the ‘ethnic’ that interconnects the individual, territory, and group in such a way that land rights follow from first-comer claims linked to the past.

This article argues for a synthesis of insights from both fields by conceptualising the root phenomenon of ‘autochthony’ in terms of the *causal logic* that underlies the (re)production of nationhood. In this sense, ‘autochthony’ can be seen as a triad in which its three components – ‘individual’, ‘territory’, and ‘group’ – are simultaneously situated in time and causally linked through the interconnections of place of birth/residence, group membership with land rights and shared culture/descent. Against this backdrop, the previously mentioned differences between studies of nationalism, on the one hand, and of autochthony, on the other, can be reinterpreted as *complementary* in addressing two alternative modes of this very same causal

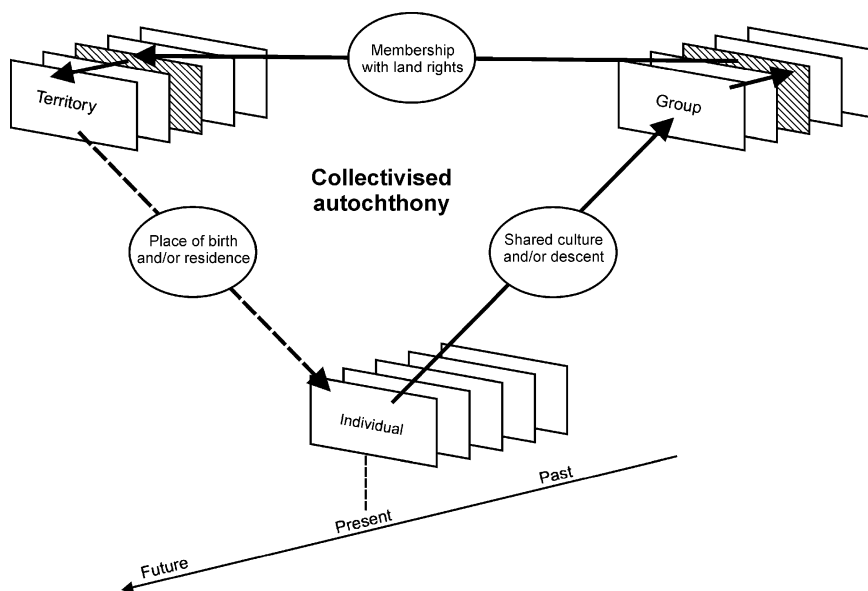


**Figure 1.** Individualised autochthony.

logic – modes distinguished only by their respective causal directions and the ways in which they handle time.

Within such an approach, ‘civic’ nationalism turns out to be based on ‘*individualised autochthony*’ in which an individual – through his or her place of birth and/or residence – first causally links up with a territory, which – through land rights embedded in membership titles – is connected to a group, which, in turn, is likely to link up again with the individual through the possible though not necessary connection of a shared culture and/or descent (see Figure 1). This type of autochthony is ‘individualised’ in the sense that the proclaimed original link between an individual, territory, and group is essentially produced through *the ‘present continuous’ of individuals*, i.e. through their individual place of birth and/or residence in their respective ‘presents’. Commonality of place of birth and/or residence thereby simultaneously connects to and constitutes both ‘the territory’ and, then, ‘the group’. Over time, this pattern is likely to ultimately also effect commonalities of culture and/or descent among these individuals (unless, of course, these individuals migrate or they are the progeny of migrant parents).

In contrast, cases typically characterised in terms of ‘ethnic’ nationalism (or, in fact, ‘autochthony’) can be interpreted as based on another autochthonous mode that inverts the causal direction of individualised autochthony: within ‘*collectivised autochthony*’, an individual – through shared culture and/or descent – first causally links up with a group, which at some point in its proclaimed past connected itself – through the establishment of land rights for its members – to a territory, which now in the present is likely



**Figure 2.** Collectivised autochthony.

to link up again with the individual through the possible though not necessary connection of placing birth and/or residence of this individual within its own confines (see Figure 2). This mode of autochthony is ‘collectivised’ since the proclaimed original link between an individual, territory, and group is essentially established through *the ‘passé simple’ of groups*, distinguishing between ‘first-comers’ and ‘late-comers’ to that territory based on alleged ‘collective pasts’. Shared culture and/or descent serve as the necessary link for an individual to be connected, first, to the group and, then, to the territory, but group, territory, and their interconnection are conceived of as being independent from and prior to the individual. In many cases, this nexus is likely to ultimately also cause the individual to be born and/or to reside within the territory to which his or her community of culture and/or descent proclaims entitlement. Yet this is not necessarily so – as the prototypical case of diasporas illustrates.

This distinction between individualised and collectivised autochthony avoids a certain ambiguity that is built into the civic–ethnic divide: on the one hand, the ‘civic’ and the ‘ethnic’ are typically distinguished by *different ingredients*. As, for instance, Smith indicated above, the ‘civic’ is typically a ‘territorial conception’, whilst the ‘ethnic’ instead emphasises the ‘community of birth and native culture’ (Smith 1991: 9, 11). However, on the other hand, only a few pages later, Smith (1991: 13–14) insists that both models also share ‘certain common beliefs about what constitutes a nation’ and goes on to enumerate these *common ingredients* in a way that largely conflates the earlier distinction between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nations. This ambiguity is dissolved

within the dichotomy of individualised and collectivised autochthony since this distinction is not based on ingredients but different causal directions in which the same elements are prototypically linked: individualised autochthony sees shared culture and/or descent as likely consequences of place of birth and/or residence, while collectivised autochthony inverts this relationship. In other words, no less than collectivised autochthons do, individualised autochthons typically envision a shared culture (and/or shared descent) within the territory of the nation. Both differ only in the causal logic they deploy to explain this coincidence. While shared culture (and/or descent) is the independent variable – the prerequisite of nationhood – for the collectivised autochthon, it is the likely but not necessary outcome for the individualised autochthon. This also means, however, that for both, ‘shared culture’ is not simply given but is either the independent cause of the nation (in collectivised autochthony) or a merely potential effect of the nation, about which one can never be sure (in individualised autochthony). As we will see, this turns ‘cultural activism’ into a potential necessity for both the collectivised and the individualised autochthon.

Compared with the extensive discussion of ‘autochthony’, the establishment of the second dimension – ‘activism’ – is much more straightforward. This dimension builds on the longstanding distinction between ‘political’ and ‘cultural nationalism’, which was elaborated by Hutchinson (1987) in his seminal study on *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* in Ireland. Hutchinson investigates three waves of cultural revivals in terms of alternating cycles of ‘political’ and ‘cultural nationalisms’, which he interprets as distinctive phenomena. ‘Political nationalism’ builds on a rationalist conception that ultimately seeks to establish the political autonomy of the nation in the form of an independent, representative state with uniform citizenship rights for its members. In order to achieve this goal, political nationalists typically organise along legal-rational lines, forming centralised apparatuses, which mobilise different groups towards this unitary end. In contrast, ‘cultural nationalism’ is rooted in a historicist cosmology of humanity naturally divided into unique territorial communities each with its own laws of growth and decay. Based on this evolutionary vision, cultural nationalism is seen as ultimately aiming for ‘the moral regeneration of the historic community, or, in other words, the recreation of their distinctive national civilization’ (Hutchinson 1987: 16). This type of nationalism propagates a return to the unique, though neglected, national culture as an inspirational means of establishing ‘authentic’ solutions for current problems. Typically, cultural nationalists thereby organise within informal and decentralised clusters of cultural societies, which only rarely transcend their character as minority phenomena.

Hutchinson’s discussion of the modern history of Irish nationalism is insightful and inspiring in many ways. Yet his analytical framework, establishing a distinction between ‘political’ and ‘cultural nationalism’ as the underlying master dichotomy, suffers from the same malaise as the civic–ethnic divide in trying to solve too much at once. I thus contend that it is

better to dissolve such master dichotomies into several analytical dimensions that respectively focus on more restricted issues. In this vein, while reserving the term 'nationalism' for the overall phenomenon, I argue for a much more circumscribed analytical distinction under the heading of 'activism': 'political activism' is then seen as ideal-typically referring to practices aimed at (re)constituting the nation as politically (more) autonomous, while the ideal-type of 'cultural activism' applies to practices aimed at the (re)constitution of the nation as culturally (more) distinctive.

It is clear that while certain practices might clearly fall into the realm of either political or cultural activism, other activities can be both political and cultural. However, one and the same practice may also lead to conflicts between political and cultural activists. Hutchinson begins his book by describing a crucial discussion at the 1909 National Convention of the United Irish League about whether or not the Irish language should be made compulsory for matriculation at the new National University. Cultural activists argued in favour of such a policy while political activists were opposed, believing that language was likely to divide rather than unite Catholics and Protestants in a common striving for an independent state. A hundred years later, the same controversy – about whether the Irish language or the political cause should take precedence – continues to divide Irish Nationalists in the North. It is to them that I now return.

### **Autochthony and activism among contemporary Irish Nationalists**

As described above, virtually all of my informants within the language scene in Catholic West Belfast gave priority to 'place of birth' rather than to 'shared culture' when asked about their Irishness. Many, if not most, held the view that Protestants are thus also Irish, whatever else they might say. Hardly any of my informants ever mentioned 'shared descent' as a relevant criterion; to the contrary, the vast majority objected to my explicit inquiries as to whether one had to be of Irish descent (or Catholic) in order to be Irish, strongly rejecting such positions as 'racist' (or 'sectarian'). This might not be representative of Irish Nationalists throughout the North, but within the radicalised, considerably leftist, and strongly Republican heartland of Catholic West Belfast, I experienced such statements as sufficiently 'authentic'. In short, reinterpreting this material in terms of 'autochthony', virtually all of my informants can without much doubt be viewed as individualised autochthons.

With regard to their language activism, most Irish speakers also agreed in seeing Irish as a crucial element of their own 'Irish culture' in need of revival. Apart from those few articulating a 'rights position', all others seemed united in a 'cultural activism' that explicitly aimed at reconstituting the cultural distinctiveness of the Irish nation through reappropriating their 'own native language'. Despite sharing cultural activism, however, there was also considerable internal dissent. Most importantly, 'culturalists' insisted on the strict

separation between cultural language activism and political activism pushing for a united Ireland and unequivocally gave priority to the language cause. By contrast, 'politicians' insisted on the inseparably cultural as well as political nature of their Irish language activism. This discrepancy highlighted the conviction among culturalists that if the Irish language and the political cause of Ireland were ever to come into conflict, politicians would sell out the cultural cause of the language for the political goal of unification. Furthermore, the conflict also revealed fears among culturalists that inverted those expressed by political activists in the 1909 National Convention: now, many culturalists in Catholic West Belfast feared that the politicians' close association of the Irish language with political activism would alienate Protestants hostile to Irish unification from the potentially common cultural cause of the language revival.

In any case, these controversies between cultural and political activists in Catholic West Belfast have taken place against the backdrop of an astonishingly uniform conception of an individualised-autochthon Irish nation. This implies, however, that the form activism takes is independent from the underlying variety of autochthony – an observation that goes against prototypical expectations raised by the civic-ethnic divide. What other factors determine the form activism takes, then?

I would argue that these determining factors are to be found in the political and cultural specificities of contexts that are experienced as 'threats' to the nation. In this sense, the most important context for locally heightening the awareness of Irish identity has been the Troubles, which broke out in 1969 after the local civil rights movement met with violent reactions by Protestants and the state. Looking back, many locals told me that they had 'always felt being Irish'. However, the Troubles brought a new sense of identity to the fore as locals increasingly came to understand the discrimination and violence they faced in terms of the oppression of 'Irish' people by agents of 'British colonialism' and 'imperialism'. From such a perspective, an end to discrimination and violence could only be achieved by removing 'the Brits'<sup>16</sup> and uniting Ireland. Given the growing sense of their own Irishness, many local Catholics also started to engage with their own history and 'Irish culture'. In this process, they were increasingly confronted with the contradiction between the high relevance of the Irish language in representations of Irishness and the low profile of Irish in daily life. Many reacted to this inconsistency by changing their language practices; they started learning their 'own native language' and thereby became language activists. Apart from such forms of cultural activism, many locals also engaged in various types of political activism – be it as civil rights activists, street protesters, members of political parties, or as supporters of or volunteers in paramilitary organisations like the IRA.

To my mind, there are three context-specific reasons for this upsurge in political and especially cultural activism during the Troubles. At the collective level, a growing awareness among oppressed people of a national identity not

yet fulfilled typically leads to nationalist movements, which – by definition – attempt to (re)constitute political autonomy and cultural distinctiveness (Smith 1991: 73–9). Within the specific Northern Irish conflict, accelerated attempts to recreate a distinctive ‘Irish culture’ became particularly urgent, given that centuries of enforced Anglicisation had increasingly prevented the reproduction of a distinctive culture as the likely outcome of ‘shared place of birth and/or residence’ within the individualised-autochthon Irish nation. In addition and closely related to this, becoming a cultural activist also helped many on a personal level to solve an identity crisis that resulted from a heightened awareness of being Irish on the one hand, and a sense of cultural self-alienation on the other. As Seosamh, a local Irish language activist in his fifties, succinctly put it (somewhat echoing Peadar):

On a personal level, and that’s just speaking about myself, it solves some problems to be involved in activities that are very clearly identifiable markers. So that one solution to a dilemma, ‘what does it mean to be Irish?’ – one *possible* solution to that dilemma is to learn the language, and speak the language.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the specific forms taken on by political and cultural activism, beginning in the context of the Troubles, also mutually influenced each other. In particular, the upsurge of political violence between the IRA and the British state during the 1970s in the absence of effective peaceful political activism drove many locals more towards the cultural rather than the political end of Irishness. As Seosamh further explained during the same interview, he could see no political activity that had anything to offer him and he ‘would have felt uncomfortable not doing anything at all’; hence, he became ‘deeply involved in the cultural issues’.<sup>18</sup> In sum, the emergence of local cultural language activism in Catholic West Belfast can be explained by the sense by locals of the insufficient cultural distinctiveness of the nation and a personal desire for a more stable Irish identity (both against the backdrop of an alienating Anglicisation) together with a lack of alternatives to the political activism of violent conflict and *not* by an underlying type of autochthony.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued for the dissolution of the ambiguous and overburdened concept of the civic–ethnic divide into several analytical dimensions. I have proposed two such dimensions – ‘autochthony’ and ‘activism’ – as modest alternatives that focus on more narrowly defined aspects of the many facets of the nation. ‘Autochthony’ refers to the specifically directed causal logic that underlies the (re)production of nationhood. In this sense, ‘autochthony’ entails a triad in which three components – ‘individual’, ‘territory’, and ‘group’ – are situated in time and causally linked through place of birth/residence, membership with land rights, and shared culture/descent. This dimension consists of a dichotomy in which ‘individualised autochthony’ links the individual, territory, and group in such a way that



shared culture and/or descent are likely to follow from place of birth and/or residence, whereas ‘collectivised autochthony’ inverts this causality. The second dimension – ‘activism’ – refers to activities that (re)constitute the nation either as politically autonomous (‘political activism’) or as culturally distinctive (‘cultural activism’).

Using the ethnographic case of contemporary Irish Nationalists in Catholic West Belfast, I have shown that – in terms of the single civic–ethnic divide – these actors could be depicted as both ‘civic’ nationalists and ‘ethno’-cultural revivalists. However, this master dichotomy misleadingly equates ‘civic’ with ‘the political’ and ‘ethnic’ with ‘the cultural’. Categorising this empirical case in civic–ethnic terms would hence not have sensitised the observer to the fact that that which fundamentally ‘causes’ the nation (now in terms of autochthony) need not also be ‘the cause’ behind activism that aims at (re)constituting the nation in times of crisis. In other words, as shown with regard to the largely cultural but also partly political activism of individualised-autochthonous nationalists in Catholic West Belfast, the type of activism is actually independent from the underlying form of autochthony. It is instead dependent upon the political and cultural specificities of the contexts that are experienced as ‘threatening’ the nation.

A final note: it is obviously not impossible to observe such operations in terms of the single civic–ethnic divide. Yet as I have tried to show, the task is made much easier when various dichotomies are analytically distinguished and ‘cross-tabulated’, rather than, by default, conflated in a single master divide. Thus by providing a better heuristic, this article has further substantiated the necessity of disambiguating the civic–ethnic distinction into several analytical axes. This need is well served by focusing on the two dimensions proposed in this article: ‘autochthony’ and ‘activism’.

## Notes

1 In the politicised Northern Irish context, the use of words referring to the region is itself a matter of dispute, purportedly reflecting one’s own position on the conflict. Having used the label ‘Northern Ireland’ in the title in order to unambiguously specify the polity at issue in this text, I subsequently use the terminology of my Irish Catholic Nationalist/Republican informants in Catholic West Belfast, who prefer terms such as ‘the North of Ireland,’ ‘the six counties’, or the ‘occupied counties’ to ‘Northern Ireland’ or ‘the province’.

2 In local discourse, the term ‘Republicanism’ refers to a more radicalised version of ‘Nationalism,’ with both aspiring to unite Ireland. In contrast, ‘Loyalism’ constitutes a more radicalised form of ‘Unionism’, with both fighting for the maintenance of the United Kingdom. Throughout this article, I use the small-letter version of ‘nationalism’ to refer to an overarching analytical concept, while reserving the capitalised term ‘Nationalism’ for that strand among local nationalisms that aims for a united Ireland.

3 This ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in the course of my Ph.D. research at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany. Apart from participant observation and informal interviews, my research produced an extensive series of in-depth interviews with a total of twenty-eight key informants. In order to insure a more representative sample, I selected interviewees with an eye towards age, gender, class, and degree of involvement in what is locally seen as ‘Irish culture’.

- 4 See especially Hindley (1990), Andrews (1997, 2000a, 2000b), Mac Póilin (1997, 2003a, 2003b, 2006), Mac Corraídh (2006), and De Brún (2006).
- 5 See especially Maguire (1991), Nig Uidhir (2006), McCoy (1997a, 1997b, 2006), Kachuk (1993, 1994) and O'Reilly (1996, 1997, 1999).
- 6 All names of informants have been anonymised.
- 7 Interview with Mary on 23 March 2004.
- 8 Interview with Robert on 5 February 2004.
- 9 Interview with Martina on 4 February 2004.
- 10 Interview with Daithí on 24 June 2004.
- 11 Interview with Peadar on 4 February 2004.
- 12 Interview with Seán on 2 April 2004.
- 13 This apparent 'immediateness' has been variously noted, for instance by the Comaroffs (2001: 648, 649, 651), who characterise autochthony as 'a naturalising allegory of collective being-in-the-world', which in self-styling itself as 'the most 'authentic', the most essential of all modes of connection', 'natures the nation'. Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005: 385, 402) equally highlight the 'apparently self-evident' nature and 'naturalness' of autochthony claims, while Geschiere and Jackson (2006: 6) speak of autochthony as putatively based 'on some sort of primordial truth-claim about belonging to the land'.
- 14 So far, autochthony research in Africa has primarily focused on Cameroon (Geschiere 2004; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000; Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003; Leonhardt 2006; Socpa 2006); Ivory Coast (Chauveau 2006; Dozon 2000; Marshall-Fratani 2006), Eastern Congo (Jackson 2006), the Black Volta region (Lentz 2003, 2006a, 2006b), and South Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Landau 2006). In Europe, Belgian Flanders has been studied in much detail (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005: 397–402; Ceuppens 2006).
- 15 Jackson (2006: 100–9) is most explicit in this regard, equating 'ethnicity' with the local, 'nationality' with the national (*sic*), i.e. with the state, and 'megaethnicity' with the regional level in his study on autochthony discourses in Eastern Congo.
- 16 In the course of arguing that local Protestants are actually also Irish, several of my Catholic informants also emphasised that the Republican usage of the phrase 'Brits out' had been unfortunate throughout the Troubles. This was so, they argued, because for Republicans the phrase meant, of course, only the British Army and the British State (as Protestants were seen as being Irish anyway). However, from the point of view of most Protestants, this slogan was seen as a direct threat to their right to stay in Ireland.
- 17 Interview with Seosamh on 14 July 2004.
- 18 Interview with Seosamh on 14 July 2004.

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# Postscript

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## Types and typologies

Nationalism comes in different types and flavours, and the case of Northern Ireland proves how these can coexist in a densely packed manner and how easily they mutate in a small high-pressure situation. Memories in the North go back a long way – the 1641 Rebellion and the 1688 Glorious Revolution are of undiminished topicality among loyalists, while nationalists invoke ‘eight centuries of British rule’ as an undigested experience. Yet, as is the nature of memories, they fail to see that the past is also, as the phrase goes, a different country. Nationalism is firmly in the present and hot on the past, but lukewarm when it comes to actual history, the record of how things change, morph and adapt in a changing world.

Nationalist movements and their actors typically invoke memories that are equally remarkable for their time-depth, their anachronistic tendency and their selective partiality. For that reason alone, any attempt at devising a typology of nationalism should ensure that a proper sense of diachronic variability is factored into the analysis, and that one uses this diachrony to double-check nationalists’ subjectivity: their own self-estimates, self-images and self-projections. These, after all, are at best perspectively coloured and at worst a rhetorical smoke screen for unstated hidden agendas or mixed feelings.

Olaf Zenker’s article very rightly points out that ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ stances are the warp and the woof of a single discourse (and, he infers, attitude) among Catholic Belfast language activists; both are subsumed under the notion of ‘autochthony’. His critique of a rigid analytical and oppositional distinction between these two types is well taken, although perhaps a little overstated. As Zenker himself acknowledges, few scholars nowadays actually use the contrast as an analytical divider between two distinct types of nationalism (as in, for instance, diesel engines vs. petrol engines), and most see it as a ‘flavour’ which only becomes meaningful in combination with other analytical criteria. As such (comparable to, say, the pH degree of acidity in a chemical compound) the differentiation still appears heuristically useful to me, if only for the fact that the discourse of nationalism itself (not just the analytical lens of the contemporary scholar) has the duality between *ethnos* and *demos*, between a shared-culture-based or a social-contract-based under-

standing of the nation, deeply embedded within its very fibre. This ambivalence in the concept of the nation – as those sharing a past (a cultural inheritance), or as those sharing a present (a society, economy and territory) – has been at the core of nationalism in all its changing historical manifestations, certainly in Europe, from the days of Herder and Rousseau onwards, and it would be unwise to dismiss its existence and operative presence. Indeed nationalism may be defined as precisely that ideology that conflates *ethnos* and *demos*. When the Parisian Jacobins in 1792 declared their Republic to be *française, une et indivisible* in one and the same phrase, and went on to emancipate its Jews and to proscribe its *patois* in one and the same gesture, they did precisely that; when Fichte and Arndt defined a German identity as an inherited, transgenerational bond of continuity between ancestors and contemporaries, and went on to define Germany as that territory *so weit die deutsche Zunge klingt*; they did precisely that. Nationalism, in one plausible definition among many others, is the geopolitical application of cultural self-awareness (at least in Europe). Civic and ethnic are the two legs on which it walks.

The history of national movements is often the history of a shifting pH degree of acidity on a sliding ethnic-civic scale. Zenker offers a very interesting empirical case study on the dynamic interaction between these flavours in present-day West Belfast, and his identification of a feedback loop between the identifications with territory and group culture ('autochthony') is convincing and insightful. But his strict typological distinction between 'individualised' and 'collectivised' autochthony seems to let the civic-ethnic distinction, so very firmly kicked out the window, back in through the back door. The former is here defined as seeing fellow-group members as sharing 'respective presents'; the latter as working by way of 'the passé simple of groups'.

How does that distinction differ from, and improve upon, the impugned one between civic and ethnic types of nationalism? Partly, I suspect, by representing the civic-ethnic distinction in overpolarised terms, as a manichean dilemma. The 'civic' aspect of nationalism is reduced to the purely geographical notion of territoriality ('place of birth', excluding the broader social dimension that is firmly part of civic nationalism), while simultaneously the 'ethnic' aspect of nationalism is reduced to the purely biological sense of 'shared descent' (likewise excluding the broader social dimension of transgenerationally transmitted or retrospectively appropriated culture: memories or historical myths, for instance). No wonder that no one, when queried in those stark terms, will want to admit to anything else than a civic-territorial loyalty; all the rest falls under the shadow of ethnic essentialism. And no wonder, subsequently, that all those who were thus corralled into the territorialist camp turn out later to have culturalist opinions as well. 'Autochthony' thus becomes the way out of a dilemma created by overstating the civic-ethnic opposition.

The case study in hand is about actors subjectively applying a concept of nationality to themselves. What we are dealing with here is not nationality or

nationalism *per se*, but the way it is represented and explained. That the author during his fieldwork ‘experienced such statements as authentic’ speaks for their representativity but does not prove their objective applicability as analytical operands.

The self-reflecting discourse of activists is representative, first and foremost, of their own self-positioning; that is to say, of a precise, specific juncture in the historical development of Irish (or Northern Irish) nationalism. Such discourse must be measured, not only against the history of Ireland or the taxonomy of sub-types of nationalism in general, but first and foremost against the history of Irish nationalism – and a history that is more recent, and more present in the informants’ minds, than the 1909 analogy adduced here. In the history of Northern Irish nationalism, a much-debated, well-documented generational shift took place in the 1970s, usually linked to the internment period of certain young Sinn Féin/IRA activists (Gerry Adams among them), who then formed the think tank of a new paradigm.

Many Northern Irish Catholics had around 1970 been inspired by Martin Luther King and his Civil Rights campaign; the IRA politicians radicalised this into a Popular Liberation Front ideology more indebted to Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh. Both moves swept aside (not without bitter transitional conflicts) an older paradigm represented by canonical figures such as John Mitchel and Patrick Pearse. That type of traditionalist, nativist nationalism, characterised by (a) its ingrained invocation of Ireland’s Gaelic roots and culture as the country’s strongest title for national separateness and its right to self-determination, and (b) by its moral conservatism and introspective isolationism, was abandoned for a new progressivism (witness Sinn Féin’s *Éire Nua* programme as adopted in the mid-1970s) almost at the same time that it also lost its dominance in the Republic (after the 1966 commemoration of the Easter Rising).

This paradigm shift has taken place within living memory, and the rejection of backward-looking, introspective and xenophobic traditionalism among Irish nationalists is still fresh and active. What persists, across this paradigm shift, is an intense anti-Britishness and an ongoing commitment to Gaelic cultural activism such as language revivalism. Only the ‘Official’ Sinn Féin/IRA took the logic of this shift to its full conclusion and dropped all culturalism in its stance, becoming a neo-Marxist ‘Workers’ Party’. They were rapidly sidelined: all other Catholic parties and activists continued to see the Northern Irish conflict in national rather than colonial or class terms, and continued to identify their position in that conflict by an ongoing invocation of inherited historical myths and memories; the more militant factions more strenuously so than the less militant ones.

Each national movement needs its Significant Other. For the nationalist community in the North of Ireland, that Other was, until the late 1960s, primarily the Stormont regime. After 1970 it became primarily the British government and Crown forces. That shift alone would entail a shift in emphasis away from culture (primary distinguishing feature vis-à-vis Protes-

tant Unionists) towards territoriality (primary distinguishing feature vis-à-vis Mainland Britain).

In this light, the singularity that Zenker rightly draws attention to becomes truly fascinating, crucial even: the fact that Gaelic-language education in West Belfast arose more or less conjointly with the IRA's move away from old-school Mitchel/Pearse-style nationalism. This is indeed intriguing; one may link it to the 1970s revival of subaltern minority cultures, also in evidence in Wales, Brittany and elsewhere, and the baby-boom generation's adoption of folk tradition as countercultural; in any case, it represents an assertion of Irish separateness from the British polity.

Cultural and political assertions of the non-Britishness of Ireland are both of them abiding and intrinsic parts of Irish nationalism, and are both of them involved in the shifting processes of self-positioning that go on in national movements, weighted and foregrounded in different gradations according to historical circumstance and individual proclivity.

All this needs to be taken into account when questioning Northern Irish informants, who, in any case, are deeply steeped in that habitus which we know from Seamus Heaney's line: 'Whatever you say, say nothing'. Gerry Adams will, in the teeth of all evidence, appearances or common-sense logic, refuse to admit that he has ever been involved in, let alone responsible for, any act of IRA violence. Nor will Sinn Féin as a political party ever explicitly admit to having institutional ties with the IRA. Nor will many nationalists nowadays admit to ethnic essentialism.



# Reply

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I am grateful to Joep Leerssen for his insightful comments and additional historical contextualisation. As a matter of fact, I agree with many of his observations and do not necessarily see them as contradicting my argumentation. However, Leerssen's reply does identify a number of points that are apparently in need of further clarification if only to establish where we do actually differ. To begin with, the reason to follow Rogers Brubaker and others in arguing for the necessity of replacing the civic-ethnic divide with several analytical dimensions consists in the observation that this master dichotomy is analytically and normatively ambiguous and unduly conflates various facets of the complex phenomenon of nationalism that are better analysed separately. The ideal-typical nature of this dichotomy is not really the problem here; hence, I do not conceive my ideal-typical usage of *autochthony* and *activism*, including my distinction between *individualised* and *collectivised autochthony*, as such a problem: empirical cases often combine elements of individualised and collectivised autochthony – for instance, consider legislation on Irish citizenship (especially after 2004) – and can be profitably described by such ideal-types.

Second, Leerssen rightly points out that the discourse of nationalism typically conflates 'ethnos' and 'demos' (i.e. notions of sharing an ancestral and/or cultural 'ethnic' past as well as sharing a present socio-economic demos of common territoriality) and that nationalism can thus be defined as 'the geopolitical application of cultural [and/or descent-related] self-awareness.' In fact, I start from that very assumption myself and then attempt to specify the ways in which the *causal relationship* between these two sides of the nationalist coin can be further conceptualised: Is the nation ideal-typically seen as rooted in notions of shared descent and/or shared culture (i.e. not only in the purely biological sense of descent, as Leerssen purports my argument to be), which *then* get(s) geopolitically applied? Or is the nation conceived of as a geopolitically circumscribed community that *over time* ends up with a common culture and/or common descent? For many people, this question is truly academic precisely because both ideal-typical causal logics seem to lead to the same result. However, in cases of 'classificatory anomaly' these issues do matter. From the perspective of many Irish Catholics in West Belfast, local Protestants in Northern Ireland constitute such a classificatory anomaly, in sharing with Catholics their place of birth – namely, 'the one and only Ireland' – while differing from what is locally conceived as distinctive Irish culture. The fact that many Irish Catholics ultimately insist on the Irishness of

Protestants, to my mind, justifies an interpretation in terms of individualised autochthony that sets *place of birth* at the beginning of a causal chain that is seen as only possibly leading to common Irish culture (and/or descent). In sum, instead of denying the coexistence of geopolitical and cultural as well as descent-related elements within nationalism, I attempt to provide a more nuanced understanding of how exactly these ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ elements are seen by social actors themselves as causally interacting with each other.

This leads to a third issue, namely, to the possible improvement of such an approach to the familiar civic-ethnic divide. To my mind, the notion of autochthony as proposed in my article and herein offers an ideal-typical model of inverse causalities, as seen by the actors involved, in bringing about specific empirical combinations of ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ elements, which the civic-ethnic divide merely registers. This, in conjunction with the second analytical dimension of activism, makes for a more nuanced approach that simply makes it easier to observe the specificities of this ‘very interesting empirical case study’.

Fourth, turning towards the methodological subtext of Leerssen’s comments, it should be emphasised that I did not begin my research with a *pre-existing* hypothesis consisting of this model of autochthony to be merely tested or ‘proved’ empirically, whatever the cost. I also did not ‘query’ my informants in any stark or mutually exclusive terms of ‘civic’ or ‘ethnic’ nationalism, as Leerssen seems to suggest. On the contrary, I simply continued to be puzzled *after* numerous, extensive, repeated and quite varied contacts with a group of informants over a period of fourteen months of fieldwork about the apparent contradiction between their explicit insistence that in order to be truly Irish, they felt they had to learn and speak their ‘own native language’, while simultaneously insisting that a shared place of birth was ultimately all that was truly needed to be(come) Irish. My proposed model of autochthony is *the result* of my attempts to get closer to an explanation – developed at book length in my PhD thesis – of how these apparently contradictory elements fit together in my informants’ approaches to their sense of Irishness. The point is thus not so much that, obviously, my informants had ‘territorialist’ as well as ‘culturalist opinions’, as Leerssen notes, but rather that these quite specific ideas, catalysing my informants’ activist practices, seemed to be utterly self-contradictory. It is true that this coexistence of elements can indeed be described in terms of the civic-ethnic divide, as I myself note in the article, yet I think that one might more easily reach a deeper understanding of local dynamics by using the proposed two dimensions of autochthony and activism.

Last but not least, Leerssen’s suggestive but erroneous conjectures regarding my encounters with West Belfast Catholics are based on the widespread assumption that territorial/‘civic’ inclusivity is generally seen as positive and hence over-communicated by all politically versed actors, whereas cultural and/or descent-related/‘ethnic’ exclusivity is seen as negative and hence is strategically under-communicated by such actors. Rogers Brubaker eloquently

shows in the text quoted in the article that this is not necessarily the case. For the Northern Irish situation since the Peace Process of the 1990s, public discourse has shifted from a *de facto* exclusion of Irishness from the public sphere to a new rhetoric, explicitly valuing a 'parity of esteem' between 'the two cultural traditions'. Under these conditions, it has turned into a politically beneficial strategy for Irish Republicans to suddenly publicly emphasise (as they have indeed started doing) that Protestants have every right to see themselves as British if they wish. In other words, contrary to Leerssen's assumption, a discourse of 'ethno'-cultural exclusion (whether or not essentialist), which separates Irish Catholics and British Protestants, has emerged as the politically correct view to espouse in public, rather than a discourse of 'civic-territorial loyalty' and inclusion. Thus, contrary to Leerssen's assumption, my interlocutors did not usually stress territorial inclusion of Protestants under the label of common Irishness but instead typically first emphasised that Protestants rightfully saw themselves as British. It was only when I succeeded, over time, in getting them to talk about their *own perceptions* of Protestants that many of my Catholic informants came out insisting that they actually still saw local Protestants as also being Irish. At the risk of taking Seamus Heaney's unguarded candour too literally, to my mind it is therefore Catholics' publicly propagated 'ethno'-cultural essentialisation of Protestants' cultural Britishness in the wake of the two-cultural-traditions-shibboleth, rather than their backgrounded discourse of inclusive Irishness based on common place of birth, that needs to be viewed with suspicion and accordingly handled with care.